

Inquiries of the Ministry

the mission would leave on Sunday, October 27, and he named the Secretary of State for External Affairs as one of the ministers who would be on that mission.

Mr. Trudeau: I would be glad to clear that up, Mr. Speaker. The statement went on to say that we were naming five ministers to that mission in order that at any one time there would be at least two there. I indicated that the ministers would be replacing one another during the course of the mission in order that not too many of them would be absent from the house at any one time. The ministers leaving on Sunday will be the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce and the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources, which means that at a later date the other three ministers I named will be replacing them in a kind of shuttle service.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member for Abitibi.

Mr. Lewis: I thought I had Your Honour's permission to ask a supplementary question?

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I understand the hon. member for York South rose on a point of order and he now wishes to ask a supplementary question.

Mr. Lewis: That is what I was trying to convey, Mr. Speaker. I want to ask the Prime Minister or the Acting Secretary of State for External Affairs, whichever one can tell us, about these attempts to get Nigerian consent through Dr. Arikpo in New York. When the Nigerian foreign commissioner was found to be in hospital in New York did our Department of External Affairs use our high commissioner in Lagos to get some kind of answer to this problem? Surely the Prime Minister is not depending only on the foreign secretary for Nigeria who is in New York?

Mr. Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, we are in constant and intense communication with our high commissioner in Lagos who, I may say, is doing an excellent job in a very difficult situation. I should like to put on record very clearly our position on this matter, if I may do so once again. It is that we are trying to act in a way which the Nigerian authorities will not consider hostile, and will not regard as an intervention in the internal affairs of that country. We may be right or wrong in not wanting to be hostile to Nigeria, but this is our position.

We want to act in a way which does not constitute an infringement on Nigerian sovereignty. We do so because the rules of international order mean something to us. We do not

believe we should intervene, as one African leader described it at the United Nations, in a way which would be determined by the imperialist press or by opportunism. This being our position, Mr. Speaker, we decided to act. We first invited the Canadian people to act as generously as they could as individuals to relieve suffering anywhere, including Biafra. We encouraged them to do so.

But as far as the government of Canada's action is concerned we only consented to put our aircraft, our official planes and our air force apparatus at the disposition of the Red Cross when the Nigerian government said that that was all right, that it would not be interpreted as a hostile act. If the same agreement can be obtained as regards the churches—

Mr. Brewin: It has been obtained from Dr. Arikpo.

Mr. Trudeau: But that is the difficulty; to arrange that the Nigerian government is able to make sure that the cargoes going through under the control of the churches will be authorized by the Red Cross. The negotiation now is between the Red Cross and the government of Lagos.

I will go on record again as saying that as soon as that has been obtained, as soon as the Red Cross has been given the green light by the Nigerian government to inspect cargoes, the planes will fly in any direction and from any point of departure. Here again, however, we are in the hands of the agreement to be reached between the Red Cross and the government at Lagos. Our authorization lies there. I state again that probably if the Nigerian government makes this arrangement with the Red Cross, if the Red Cross is there to inspect the cargoes, and if this is done with the authority of the Nigerian government, our planes will fly from Sao Tome, Fernando Po or anywhere else.

Mr. Lewis: Mr. Speaker, so far as I am concerned I should like to ask the Prime Minister to finally assure this house that the government will not recall the Hercules planes and that they will be used from Sao Tome as soon as this, to me, unnecessary agreement is finally received.

Mr. Trudeau: Well, Mr. Speaker, with respect I must disagree with the expression "unnecessary agreement". If we do not obtain the agreement we will then be performing a hostile act.